

THE ARCHITECTURAL FACADE AS AN URBAN SOLUTION IN MOROCCO CASE STUDY OF THE BÂLIMA HOTEL IN RABAT (1912-1950)

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ABSTRACT

The facade, in architecture, is one of the most identifiable elements; it's made up of unique elements, which are entities with their own capacity for expression. The composition of a facade consists, however, in structuring on the one hand and in ordering, on the other hand, the basic elements (window, roof, etc.) which, by their nature, are different in their forms, colors and materials. All these parts must remain individually recognizable, even if the common language that binds them to the whole building.

Rabat, along with the French protectorate, saw the arrival of a group of architects who sought new ground for architectural creation, a creation that focused on the facade as the main element of innovation and the new.

Between 1912 and 1950, Morocco saw itself exteriorize its facades, which were always introverted, by exhibiting all the ornamentation and the work of the craftsmen on the facade, whereas it was always reserved for interiors.

The Bâlima hotel is considered to be one of the most emblematic buildings of the city of Rabat, which had its facade built jointly with the municipal authorities of the time, who wanted, through this architectural facade, to shape the cityscape of the entire city.

KEYWORDS: *Facade, Architecture, Bâlimahotel, Lyautey, Rabat, Morocco*

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INTRODUCTION

L.B. Alberti defined the facade as follows: "the wall is effective as the foundation of society and thus granted the most honorable place of architecture. The wall is more preferred than the column, it is a noblest manifestation of architecture" (Neumeyer, 1999, p. 47). It communicates both the function and the meaning of the building (Krier, R. 1992)¹. The facade remains the most important architectural element capable of conveying, through the perceived image, the function and meaning of a building, taking into account the theoretical change that the facade experienced in the 20th century, as a supporting element essential for the stability of the building and where the ideology of the self-supporting object, visible from all sides, has become predominant.

Le Corbusier even stated the fifth facade as a principle of modern architecture. It manifests itself in the expression of the form of a building, it is also the first impression of the building in front of the user.

The perfection of the body of the building had the advantage over creating a "spectacle side" facing the street. It was only at the end of the 20th century, after the rediscovery of the importance of the public domain and

¹Elements of architecture, Krier R., Architecture Design, Academy editions, London 1992

the value of urban life, that the facade regained a new value. It is a major component of a building, it plays an interface role with the outside world, it conveys several types of messages, direct, indirect or symbolic, it is according to C. Alexander and A. Levy: "l'enveloppe and the framing of a compound structure, it is defined as a compound system, it plays an intermediary role of mediator between the project and the observer, it is a symbolic heritage". Bearer of identity, the facade reflects the heritage values of architectural objects (aesthetic, historical and architectural value) and participates in the composition of the urban landscape.

Indeed, the reading of the urban space, composed mainly of buildings, is done through the "visible of the built"² facades, which offer a linear continuum of the street. In addition to the construction, several elements are necessary in terms of function, adding a plus to the animation of the facade such as window boxes or flower pots give the building a summer and winter look.

The horizontal layering of the facade results from the different functional areas. In principle, a facade should never be designed without horizontal differentiation³. A clear distinction is particularly appropriate between the ground floor, ordinary floors and recessed floors. The facade as a "constructed border" acts in the same way as the portal.

THE FRENCH EXPERIENCE IN URBAN PLANNING ON NEW GROUND

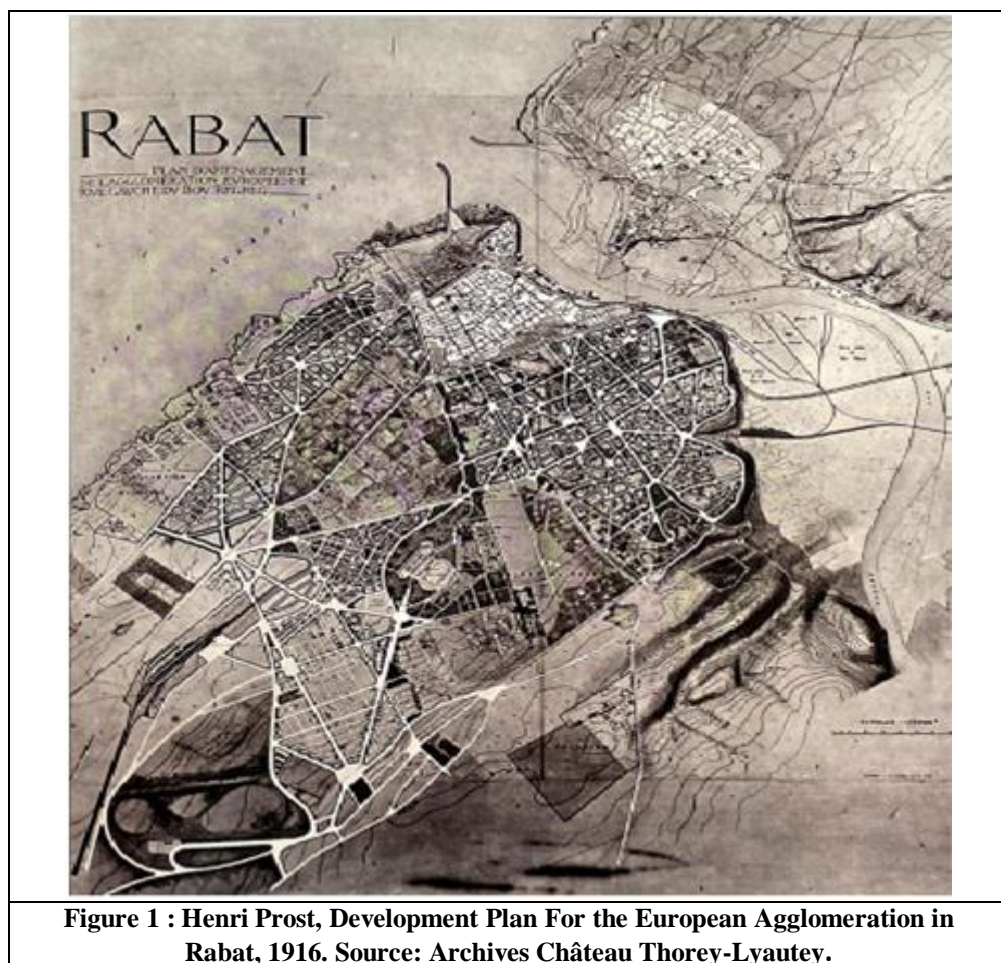


Figure 1 : Henri Prost, Development Plan For the European Agglomeration in Rabat, 1916. Source: Archives Château Thorey-Lyautey.

²KASSAB.T 2009, "Evolution of representation systems of Algiers urban landscapes". In the FSP Project, the scales of social space in the Maghreb, the neighborhood as a territory of urban integration,

³ibid

Morocco signed a treaty with France establishing the protectorate in 1912, the primary argument of which was to protect the Shereefian Kingdom from a stake in political and economic rivalries between the great colonial powers⁴. This treaty guaranteed France a territory without sharing with the already colonized Algeria and saved it an imminent war with Germany⁵.

The protectorate established in Morocco called "pacification of Morocco"⁶ was above all a major strategic issue for Louis Hubert Lyautey⁷, general resident in Morocco (1912 - 1925), he initiated an experimental reflection on the development of cities. The main idea was that through a regulated town planning, imagined to ensure the safety of colonial military troops and thus limit the risks of urban revolt which Morocco had already been confronted with a few years previously, without demolishing or razing the old towns already present. across the country.

In Morocco, the French Protectorate carried the urban question as its main public action, it was considered a major concern of the town planning department, as it hoped to transfer this experience to Paris.

Political and urban visions were inseparable in the construction of the new city of Rabat, Lyautey, Resident General, was passionate about town planning and was the technician of general ideas. He even began by sketching out the town plans himself.

Rabat represented a new experimental field for the colonial regime, which wanted to translate its power and modernism through town planning. It was the first major modern achievement outside of the traditional model.

The peculiarity of the European city in Morocco is that it was outgoing, unlike the medina. It manifested itself, through the architecture of the buildings, to mark the power of the state. The avenue Dar El Makhzen, current Boulevard Mohammed V, was one of the most controversial axes, it was the heart and the main facade of the new colonial capital in Morocco

Lyautey described colonial architecture in Morocco as one of the few spectacular manifestations of a state style in the 20th century⁸. Its architect Laforgue also described it as frank, logical and tasteful architecture. He believed that traditional Moroccan art deserves to be admired, preserved, restored, but not imitated, qualifying the borrowing of Arab architecture as a major action⁹,

*"There is one point, in particular, of which we do some honor, and that is to have attached ourselves to one of the best characteristics of Arab construction, exterior sobriety ... Arab construction makes it a point of honor not to manifest itself. On the outside only by the line, the simplicity of the contours and the facades"*¹⁰

⁴ According to the treaty for the organization of the French protectorate in the Shereefian Empire, concluded in Fez, March 30, 1912, in Article 3. It states: "The Government of the Republic undertakes to lend constant support to His Shereefian Majesty against any danger which would threaten his person or his throne...".

⁵ On July 1, 1911, Germany refused the fait accompli imposed by France on Morocco. After a very strong tension which makes believe in the imminence of war, an agreement is signed between the two countries, which leaves the hands free to France in the Sherifian empire.

⁶ The pacification of Morocco, 1907 - 1934, J. LADREIT DELACHARRIERE, publications of the French Africa Committee Paris 1936

⁷ General resident in Morocco from 1912 to 1925.

⁸ LYAUTEY (L.H.G), 1927, op.

⁹ LAFORGUE Adrien, architecture in Morocco, the Moroccan miracle The region of Rabat, Editions de la Verite Marocaine, 1932

¹⁰ LYAUTEY (L.H.G), 1927, op

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COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE IN MOROCCO: FAÇADE'S DETAILS

The architecture of Boulevard Mohammed V, called colonial or “arabisation”¹¹ Architecture was formal, it was systematically imposed for all new constructions in this zone, for the equipment and for the apartment buildings, it was necessary. This is a new experience of "Arabization of architectural forms" imported from Europe. Some buildings on Boulevard Mohammed V are even considered to be "Arabized" replicas of buildings built in France, such as the treasury dome which looks like the Paris stock exchange and the central post office which is the twin of the central one.

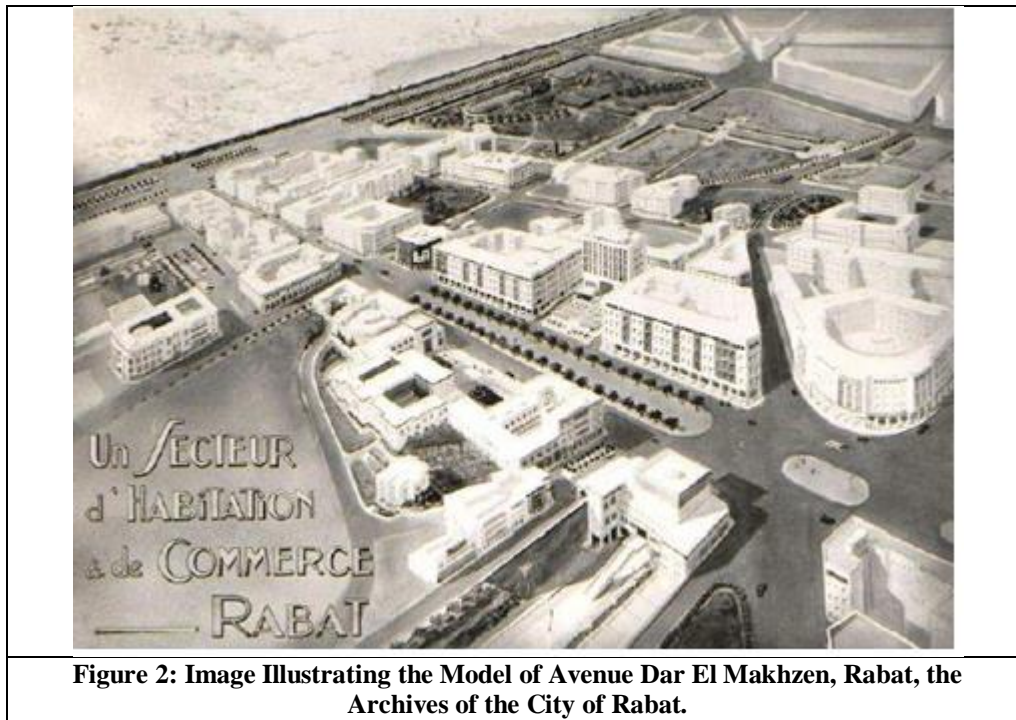


Figure 2: Image Illustrating the Model of Avenue Dar El Makhzen, Rabat, the Archives of the City of Rabat.

This architecture was based on two principles: spatial organization and architectural details. The rules of spatial composition were thus based on axiality, symmetry and the regulating line. The decoration is omnipresent referring to several artistic styles, art deco, art nouveau, neo-Moorish and modern. On the other hand, the majority of buildings are thus punctuated by the architecture of large public facilities.

The city of Rabat, with the arrival of the protectorate, saw the establishment of very specific regulations in the sector of the Rabat passenger train station¹², avenue Dar El Makhzen (coursLyauteyor avenue Mohammed V currently). This is an architectural ordinance and a development plan which, approved by the ShereefianDahir on August 13, 1917, and modified according to the Dahir of January 20, 1923, this one instituted an aspect easement for the buildings. facing the garden from the view triangle. Also, another Dahir of August 12, 1927, he proposed an architectural ordinance and a limitation of heights to four floors on this entire avenue¹³.

¹¹ Jonnart Charles, Governor General of Algeria at the beginning of the 20th century, was the instigator of this Arabist architecture in North Africa (OULEBSIR Nabila, uses of heritage, monuments, museums and colonial policy in Algeria (1830, 1930), Editions la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris, 2004).

¹² Current Rabat-city station

¹³ This architectural ordinance gave rise to a series of disputes and writings from the owners of land in this sector, in this case, the BALIMA Company, which was the main actor in this part of the city.

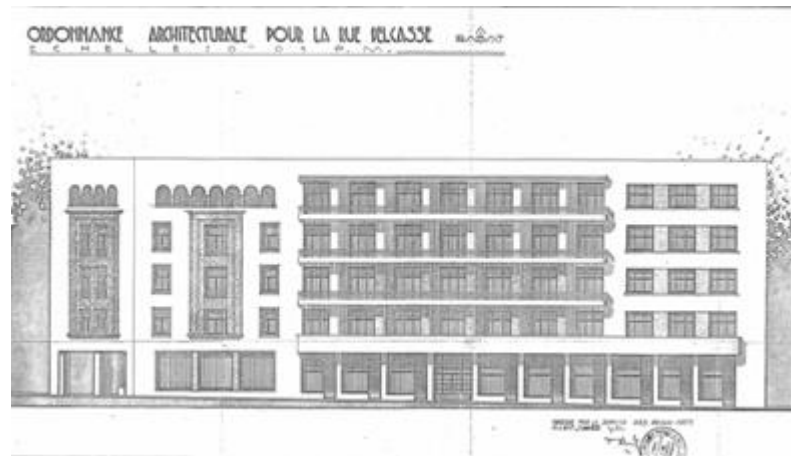


Figure 3: Facade Proposal Validated in Cour Lyautey by the Architect J.F Robert on Behalf of the BALIMA Company Year 1953. Source: The Archives of the Municipality Hassan Rabat 2018.

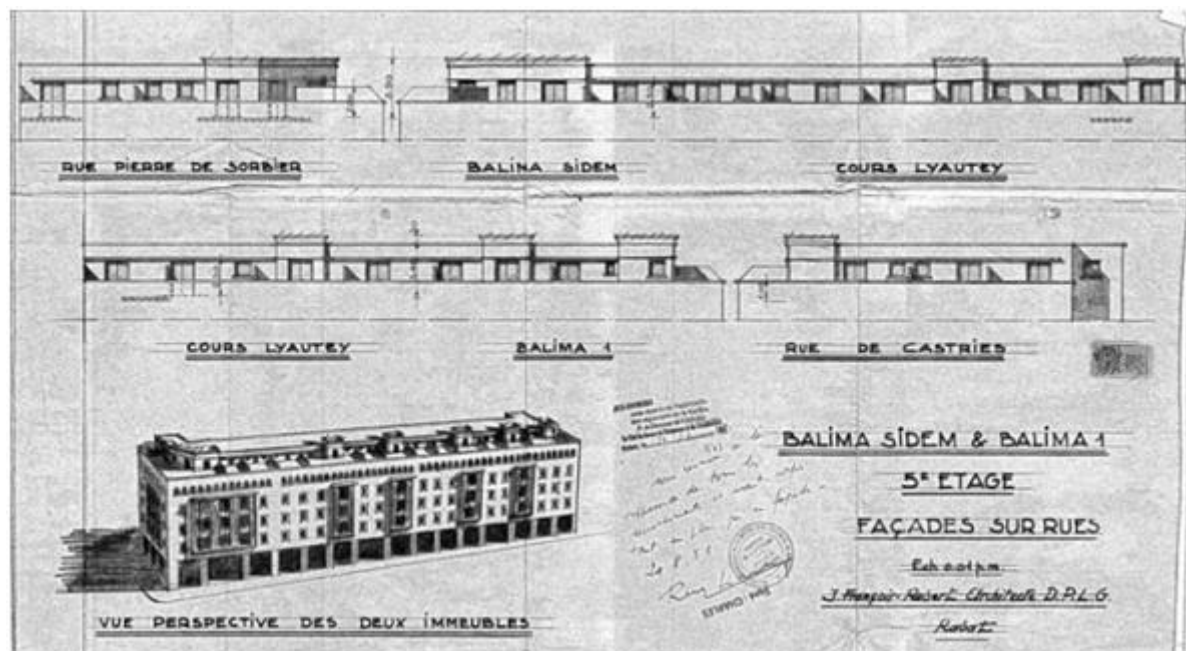


Figure 4: Proposal for an Architectural Ordinance on Rue Delcasse in Rabat by the Fine Arts Department 1932, Source: Archives of the Municipality of Rabat 2018.

It is appropriate here to explore the relationship between the change in land use and the singularities of the facade, conveying architectural values derived from the historical typologies of housing which have shaped the urban layout and the appearance of the property. To do this, the main objective is to locate and attribute the singularities and values, then identify and analyze the possible threats affecting the singularities (Mhammedi 2018, p. 20).



Figure 5: Schematic Ground Plan of the Location of the Hotel Balima on the "Cour Lyautey" square, Karima Berdouz 2018.

The French administration, in charge of the development, has set up specifications, where the buyers are obliged to comply with the drawings made by the services of fine arts and historical monuments, these drawings "imposed"¹⁴ on investors¹⁵, then encouraged and invited, during the construction of buildings located in this area.

The services of fine arts and historic monuments were responsible for detailing even the colors, the materials used, the dimensions of the windows and the locations of the terraces, a work supposed to be done by the architect, master builder, oriented and validated. by the contracting authority before sending it to the municipal services for authorization.

The peculiarity of this procedure where state services intervene (or even design) facades for the architects responsible for drawing up the plans, means that this part of the city was indeed mastered and governed by an architectural charter which limited any intervention " fortuitous ". This limitation made the BALIMA Company and the architects¹⁶ responsible for the buildings located in this area react. There were even writings by Mr LAFORGUE¹⁷ who considered that the design of the facade of the Hotel BALIMA designed by the services of fine arts and historic monuments was " against architecture"¹⁸.

THE BALIMA BUILDING, AN EMBLEMATIC FACADE FROM THE DESIGN STAGE

The BALIMA company, whose name is the acronym of the names of its three founding partners Lucien BARDY, André

¹⁴ Term used by municipal services in 1931

¹⁵ The main investor in this area was the company BALIMA.

¹⁶ Armand Cerceau, Laforgue, Jean-François Robert

¹⁷ Architect in charge of the BALIMA Hotel

¹⁸ Description of LAFORGUE at the BALIMA Hotel when the municipal services proposed a facade of 30 meters over the entire facade instead of 29 m.

LIOREL and Louis MATHIAS, was founded in the early 1920s¹⁹. It is a company primarily engaged in real estate transactions and the construction of rental properties. The heritage of this company is mainly located in downtown Rabat, and the emblematic building that has been talked about throughout its existence was the Hotel BALIMA.

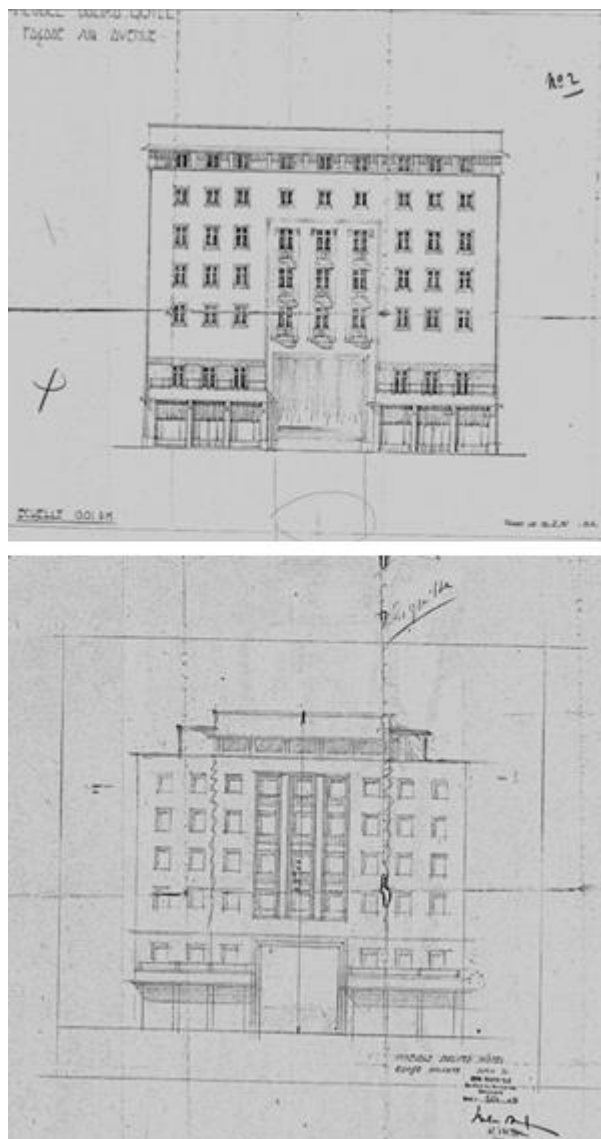


Figure 6: Various Proposals for the Facade of the Hotel Bâlima Offered to Municipal Services. Sources: The Archives of the Commune Hassan, Rabat 2018.

The BALIMA Hotel, built on land originally intended to house an apartment building, enjoys a strategic location, and is a major constraint in terms of urban regulations and architectural regulations, which has aroused a lot of reactions. It is located at the end of the "small square"²⁰ which was spared on the side of the Lyautey court (former avenue Dar El Makhzen and now avenue Mohammed V) and opposite the Palais de Justice (current parliament), built at the same time by the company BALIMA.

¹⁹ The first authorization decision to construct buildings under the architectural ordinance in the name of the company BALIMA dates from March 3, 1923, made by the architect Mr HANQUET on avenue Dar El Makhzen (now avenue Mohammed V)

²⁰ Small square, indicated in a letter from the municipal administration n ° 3488AM of May 2, 1931, addressed to the chief civil controller of the region of Rabat

The BALIMA Hotel was considered by the municipal administration as a means to "brighten up"²¹ the architectural order present in this part of the city, was even considered by the Department of Fine Arts as an element to "furnish space", alongside the buildings located upstream from the station square.

The BALIMA Hotel is characterized by a terrace and a passage, which were the subject of a complex administrative procedure in the 1930s.

The BALIMA terrace, a plot of 1321 m² is part of a property known as the "Dar El Maghzen State Building", was acquired by the Cherifian State from the real estate, commercial and financial cooperative consortium, according to an administrative act on April 12, 1930, for a sum of two million five hundred francs (2,000,500.00 F)²². This plot will be affected by a covered passage easement 8.50 m wide and 15.50 m long, connecting the terrace to rue Gentil and providing a view of the garden of the municipality.

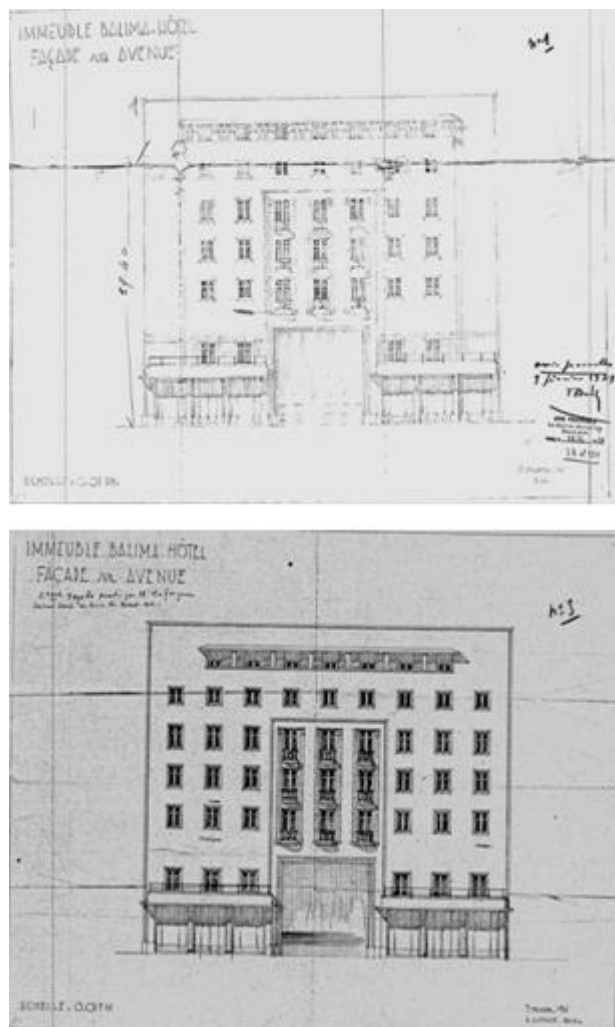


Figure 7: Various Proposals for the Facade of the Hotel Bâlima Offered to Municipal Services. Sources: The archives of the Commune Hassan, Rabat 2018.

²¹ Word used in a letter from the municipal administration dated May 2, 1931, addressed to the Civil Controller, Head of the Region of Rabat, speaking of the BALIMA Hotel.

²² Old French currency before the Euro.

Subsequently, the Cherifian State, by administrative act dated July 4, 1931, retroceded a plot of 272 m² to this same company in compensation for this right of way, and on which the company BALIMA, was authorized to build only a front part of the building in the basement and the Ground floor. This agreement is sealed according to an agreement signed and accepted by all stakeholders, namely the municipal administration, the General Secretariat of the Protectorate, the Finance Department and the legal representatives of the company BALIMA on July 4, 1931.

While this administrative procedure was still in progress, the construction works of the BALIMA hotel started, without authorizations, taking advantage of the opening of a set of sites by the same company, namely, the courthouse and a set of buildings forming the architectural order.

It was at this time and during a simple routine check by the municipal administration that the infringement of the Dahir of 1924 was lifted when the works reached the second floor, it is then that the first request building permit was filed in March 1931.



Figure 8: Photograph Illustrating The Hotel Balima, Avenue Mohamed V, Rabat. Source: Moroccan Architecture of the 20th Century, by Gislhaine Meffre, Photo Bernard Delgado 2012

At this stage, the architect of the LAFORGUE project presented a 29-meter-high building on the recessed terrace from which they built it, something which was refused by municipal services.



Figure 9: Image Illustrating a Proposal for an Advertising Sign Proposed to the Municipality for Agreement, in 1932, Archives of the Municipality of Hassan, 2018

In a series of writings, back and forth and blockage at the municipal administration level regarding the validation of the heights and the facade of the Hotel. The company BALIMA has proceeded to a total shutdown of all its ongoing projects in the capital: The Balima3 and 2 buildings as well as the courthouse²³. It even postponed nearly 700 "European workers" paid by the day, something which created discontent with the working population in Rabat and with the Permanent Resident of the protectorate. This pressure tactic led the various parties to switch to more flexible negotiations. It was then that the building permit decision was issued on November 17, 1931.

BALIMA HOTEL, A FACADE, A LANGUAGE, A SYMBOL

All the facades built in this period were the work of the Department of Fine Arts and Historical Monuments, they had even sparked a popular debate on the aesthetic "chaotic"²⁴ the aspect of Avenue Lyautey. With a proposal from the Hotel BALIMA in retreat and a height exceeding the 29 m authorized, it was considered, rather as a "belfry"²⁵ than a residential building with its disproportionate dimensions of a height of 30.55 m later reduced to 29 m, a frontage width of 36 m and a depth of 13 m.

The municipal services often insisted on the effect of unity which can only be obtained by the rigorous application of easements and that any deviation has no other consequence than to destroy the symmetry desired by the authors of the plan of development, which symmetry is necessary for the harmony of the city, already compromised by successive modifications of this plan.

The height of the BALIMA hotel was the subject of press articles, stating that this question concerned the aesthetics of the entire city of Rabat.

²³Parlementactuellement

²⁴ Comment from the municipal administration describing the facades proposed by the Department of Fine Arts and Historical Monuments.

²⁵ Term used by the municipal administration when describing the BALIMA hotel in 1931.

CONCLUSIONS

In any scientific approach, time remains an important element to justify an experiment, especially in our case, as this experiment is also linked to a sociological discipline that is use and perception.

From another urban perspective, housing is decisive for the historic urban fabric. Together with city landmarks such as mosques and squares, they have determined the characteristics of the urban layout throughout history. Mosques, schools and other facilities would not be in place without their homogeneous urban context or vice versa. It is therefore important to maintain or recover the integrity of the homogeneity and urban aspect of the historic city center.

While the cityscape perspective takes a broader spatial perspective than architecture, the concepts of the two are closely related.

The updated or newly designed fabric behind the facade must then always take into account and respect the historic facade with its image and identity and integrate the historic facade in such a way that it fits into the process of urban change. In this way, the “image and identity” value (concept of the 2I)²⁶ present on the facade as well as the homogeneity and the urban appearance of the historic city center will be preserved or improved on an urban scale, the internal form is updated. day or newly designed building imparting new architectural qualities to the architectural scale.

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²⁶ The concept of "2I" is a concept first said at the end of studies in town planning on images of the city supported by Karima Berdouz in 2017 at the National Institute of Planning and Urbanism

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